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ABSTRACT

Connemara, a rural region in Ireland, is characterized by high unemployment, high emigration, poor infrastructure, inadequate public services, and a low rate of transfer to third-level education. To address the situation, the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT), joined forces with Connemara West (a community-owned development organization in the village of Letterfrack) to establish and operate a 2-year postsecondary program in furniture design and manufacture. The aim was to make the Furniture College a nationally, even internationally, renowned center for developing and teaching skills in modern furniture design and technology. By doing so, they hoped to expand economic opportunity for area youth, stimulate the local economy, revive the lagging Irish furniture industry, and increase national demand for high-quality furniture. Programs offered include a certificate in furniture design and manufacture, a bachelor of science in furniture technology, and a certificate in furniture production. The Furniture Technology Center, an entity developed by but separate from the college, offers technical consulting, technical information, courses, seminars, and technology demonstrations. The Furniture Restoration Center is another successful but separate entity of the college. Nearly all students surveyed for this report expect to leave the area, as there are still few local companies to employ them. It is still too early to calculate the college's potential economic impact on the local economy. (NB)

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Reviving a Community, Modernizing an Industry: Ireland's Furniture College

Like many rural regions in Ireland, Connemara—on the western edge of the service area of the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT)—is characterized by high unemployment, high emigration, poor infrastructure, inadequate public services, and a low rate of transfer to third-level education. Indeed, it is a scenic, but remote place, with little industry and few jobs for its youth.

To address the situation, GMIT (then called Regional Technical College at Galway) and Connemara West (a community-owned development organization in the village of Letterfrack) joined forces in 1998 to establish and operate a two-year, tertiary (post-secondary) program in furniture design and manufacture. Their aim: to make the Furniture College a nationally, and perhaps internationally, renowned center for developing and teaching skills in modern furniture design and technology. By doing so, they hoped also to expand economic opportunities for the area's youth, stimulate the local economy, revive the lagging Irish furniture industry, and increase national demand for high-quality furniture.

Why Furniture?

To focus on the furniture industry was not an intuitive choice. Composed of relatively small companies producing almost exclusively for domestic markets, Ireland's furniture industry is dispersed and fragmented, slow to modernize, and not considered very competitive. It lacks the elements of a cluster that produce synergy—interdependent companies, social infrastructure, flow of information and innovation, and sense of common purpose and vision. Furthermore, it is not noted for aesthetic design. Indeed, few companies even employed professional designers.

In this industry, however, Connemara West (CW) and GMIT saw opportunity. Because of its relatively large size (some 600 companies and 5,000 employees), and because many of the firms are locally owned, the industry is an important one to an Irish economy dominated by foreign-owned branch plants. And, as noted above, it was an industry that needed help. The new college, they hoped, would provide that help, becoming the catalyst for infusing the industry with skilled and talented workers and creative design. This unique partnership, it was anticipated, would not only produce individuals qualified for employment in the furniture industry, but would also produce people with the knowledge of design and production techniques needed to leapfrog the industry ahead of its competition. Graduates were intended to become catalysts for change and modernization and to sow the seeds for a new, dynamic, and innovative industry. At the same time, they hoped the college would provide the region with sustainable jobs and economic development; they hoped furniture would become an economic development niche for the community. Thus, the Furniture College at Letterfrack was both a national cluster strategy and a local development strategy at once—a tall order for this new school located not in the midst of any industry concentrations, but in a former boys' reformatory in the remote outreaches of western Ireland.

The Partners and Their Program

Connemara West

Formed in 1972, CW is one of the oldest rural community development groups in Ireland. Owned by 500 local shareholders, and minority shareholders Galway County Council and Ireland West Tourism, the organization is run by 12 volunteer directors who are elected by shareholders for three-year terms.

Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology

GMIT is one of 12 technical colleges established in Ireland in 1972 to address the increasing skill requirements of the large number of branch plants that were locating in the country. Called the Regional

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Milestones

1982 With funds from the Youth Employment Agency, CW became involved in educating and training young people. The three-year wood skills training course graduated 15 local youths.

1987 GMIT (then called the Regional Technical College at Galway) became involved, and a two-year, full-time, third-level course in fine woodworking and design was established in Letterfrack. The first course began with 12 students. Thus, was born the Furniture College.

1991 The Furniture College initiated closer contact with industry in order to improve graduates' employment options and to evaluate the certificate in relation to industry needs. This involved

- preparing a data base of Irish furniture manufacturers and products;
- investigating education and training needs of companies;
- collecting and summarizing published reports on the industry; and
- working with statutory agencies involved in the industry.

1993 College staff visited the UK, Italy, and Denmark to examine the educational, training, research and technical support infrastructure in these countries in relation to the wood and furniture industries. The original certificate program was overhauled, refocused, and renamed National Certificate in Furniture Design and Manufacture.

1995 A two-year, add-on B. Sc, degree in furniture technology began at the Furniture College with 8 students. The first year began with eight students.

1997 4.5 million pounds in funding was approved for infrastructure and facility development at the college.

1998 A new two-year certificate program in furniture production was established and focused on educating and training students for more machinery-intensive environments and high-volume production facilities.

2001 Completion of new buildings and facilities is expected early in the year. A new three-year diploma in furniture conservation and restoration will begin in September.

Technical College-Galway until 1998 when all the technical colleges were renamed to institutes of technology, GMIT serves primarily the Counties Galway and Mayo in northwestern Ireland. GMIT has three campuses, one in Galway city with some 4,500 students, one in Castlebar (the largest town in County Mayo) with some 1,000 students, and the Furniture College in Letterfrack with just under 100 students.

The Furniture College

The college has its roots in the early efforts of Connemara West. In 1978 CW purchased the buildings (an old reform school) in the village of Letterfrack that now constitute Connemara West Center—home of the Furniture College, the Furniture Technology Center, the Furniture Restoration Center, and other CW programs. In 1980, with support from the Irish Development Authority, CW purchased a number of craft centers, including one for woodworking and furniture restoration. Two years later, with support from the newly established Youth Employment Agency, CW initiated a three-year training course in woodworking for local youth. When later the Youth Employment Agency withdrew its support, CW enlisted GMIT to partner with it and establish a two-year, third-level program in furniture design and manufacture. Thus, was born in 1987 the Furniture College. It had 12 students. Two years later the college conferred its first graduation certificates.

From those roots has grown a program that aims to

- provide for the local community, region, and nation a base for the development of the Irish furniture industry
- enable its graduates to contribute to and influence the design and manufacture of modern furniture in ways that are innovative, creative, and responsive to social and economic needs
- provide the seed ground for the development of an indigenous approach to furniture making and the influence of Irish design

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- create an awareness in the market of quality furniture made in Ireland.

By 1997 the program had grown to 27 students, two certificate programs (one in furniture design and manufacture and one in furniture production), and a B.Sc. program in furniture technology. By 2000 the college had 85 students. In 2002 enrollment is expected to reach 160.

Certificate in furniture design and manufacture

Because many Irish furniture companies build to customer specification, design is not often thought to be a major issue. However, most companies actually deal extensively with design, albeit focused on manufacturing aspects and often handled informally through discussion and consultation with the clients. Some of the larger firms have a more structured approach to design, and some use furniture designers to assist them with new products. The two-year national certificate program in furniture design and manufacture has developed a good reputation for successfully merging design and technological skills. Its graduates are well equipped on both fronts. In addition, they have an awareness of business and marketing.

The reputation of the course is also reflected in the national and international design and furniture journal articles published by its graduates. In addition, exhibitions of student furniture have been held in Letterfrack, Eyre Square Centre Galway, the Crafts Council of Ireland Gallery in Dublin, the University College Dublin, and at various conferences.

Finally, its reputation is demonstrated by student demand. For the 20 available slots per year, demand currently numbers over 300.

Bachelors of Science in furniture technology

In 1995 the college began its B.Sc. degree (a two-year program that may be taken after completion of a certificate program). As with all programs at the college, it was developed with the active assistance of the industry.

Historically there have been very few professional managers in the industry; most Irish furniture companies are owner-managed. The owners are usually hard-working, entrepreneurial people with excellent production skills and experience, but unfortunately with little management expertise. As a result, the owner-managers are often bound up with the day-to-day details of production and deal with management issues in fire-fighting mode. The furniture technology degree equips graduates with the theoretical and practical skills needed to move confidently into senior positions in the furniture manufacturing industry. The first students graduated in 1997 and within weeks found jobs in the industry.

The course contains a high level of project work and cooperative (industry-based) education. It concentrates on important areas of the industry, such as plant layout and design, equipment specification and selection, materials planning, production scheduling, costing, automation, quality management, computer applications, marketing, and product design and development.

Certificate in furniture production

A new two-year national certificate course in furniture production commenced in September 1998. The program includes education and training in production and technological competencies for shop floor and supervisory workers. The emphasis: producing quality furniture in modern manufacturing environments. As with the others, this course was developed with the help and assistance of the industry, recognizing that a new level of technology skills is required.

In the past, the dominant production issues were equipment considerations (so called "hard technologies") and operator skill shortages. The potential of the "softer" technologies—planning techniques, analytical methods, and management systems—was not usually explored. Now, however, new hard and soft technologies must be fully exploited for companies to improve and grow. Graduates of the new course will be able to develop manufacturing plans; improve production, materials processing, and quality systems; and use a wide range of workshop and volume production equipment.

Administering the programs

GMIT pays the lecturers and some administrative staff, owns most of the equipment, sets the exams, owns the programs, and rents space from CW. In addition, students are registered GMIT students and graduate with National Council for Educational Awards certificates and awards. Still, CW originated the project and usually provides the drive to support initiatives by college staff. Furthermore, responsibility for managing, strategizing, and planning the programs is shared by CW and GMIT, with industry playing a key advisory role. So, although GMIT "runs" the programs, the Furniture College would simply not be where it is, both in terms of success and its location, without CW. The phrase "Furniture College" is actually a marketing title agreed by the

partners. It currently has no legal standing. However, the spirit of the partnership is such that CW is regarded as an equal partner in the Furniture College.

The facilities are well equipped with workshops, design studios, and special areas for everything from lamination to computer design. The library contains over 2,000 books, as well as videos and an electronic information center with specialized software and computer-based access to all resources and courses at GMIT. A bus operates between the two institutions.

The Furniture Technology Center

Established in 1997, when staff recognized an opportunity to conduct research and development for industry and thereby more directly diffuse into industry the technologies being taught to students, the center is a separate legal entity from the college. It offers technical consulting; technical information; courses, seminars, and technology demonstrations; and research and development. It is located at the college, managed by CW, and advised by GMIT and a group of furniture companies. The level of co-operation between staff in the college and the FTC is really based on the excellent relationships between the individuals in both organizations. Unfortunately, a formal relationship was never established.

The Furniture Restoration Center

The Furniture Restoration Center opened in 2000 and is also a separate legal entity from the college. It has principally been engaged in restoration work for the National Gallery of Ireland. The manager of the center remarked that there are enough pieces for restoration in the National Gallery to keep the center busy for several years. Recently the center has appraised several projects, including one for the restoration of all the period furniture in a major courthouse. To date there has been little opportunity for co-operation between the restoration center and the college staff. However, when the new program in furniture restoration and conservation begins next year the opportunities for co-operation will increase.

Stakeholders

Customers

Like most third-level institutions, the college has some interesting customer relationships. Although students are the primary customers, they are also the product, and prospective employers (the industry) the customers. Thus, the college has two groups of customers with very different requirements, characteristics, and performance measures.

The college's students come from all over. Only 24 percent are from County Galway, 69 percent from other parts of Ireland, and 7 percent from other countries. Most of them learned about the program at their previous school (53 percent), but advertisements were also an effective method for reaching students (19 percent), as was family influence (15 percent). Applicants to the certificate programs are expected to have a good grasp of math and science. Previous work in sciences, computing, engineering, technical drawing, and art are favored qualifications. The minimum entry requirement is successful completion of five "leaving certificate" subjects including math and English or Irish. Admission is based on points given for six best subjects and, in the case of the certificate in design and manufacture, points are given for interest and ability to work with the materials as demonstrated during a personal interview.

Viewing industry as a customer, and incorporating its requirements in the courses is a given at the college. It works hard to build connections to the industry and realizes that the success of its programs depends in part on the willingness of companies to use graduates to their fullest capacity. Companies also participate on advisory boards of both the college and the new technology center.

However, the process of course development is a complex matter, and the relationship with industry is managed to provide optimum long-term educational solutions. The maintenance of a cooperative relationship, rather than one in which the college plays a subservient role to industry, is a key factor in the long-term development of the college. This role has become accepted and respected by the industry, and the college is now acknowledged as the prime mover in education for the furniture industry in Ireland.

Although, there are still many areas for improvement within the Irish furniture industry, the outlook is extremely good. There appears to be a mood of enlightenment moving through the industry and gathering speed. There is definitely a new appreciation of the value of training, information systems, and professional management. There also appears to be an emerging willingness to share information and cooperate within the industry. And more companies are developing progressive and modern operations strategies—extensive use of information systems; advanced health, safety and environmental policies; comprehensive employee training programs; extensive investment in new production technology; use of

skilled graduates in middle management; quality systems; well-developed marketing and design resources; and prudent use of external expertise.

While there are always many reasons for change in industry, one of the reasons for these changes in the industry thinking is probably the current economic boom. In the past, most Irish furniture companies have had little money to invest in people, equipment, or systems. Now that times are better, some companies are more willing to invest their profits. In fact, several companies have put forth the argument that they are willing to invest in change now in order to improve their performance and their ability to compete when the bad times come again.

Another possible factor in the change is the fact that the furniture industry is now competing heavily with more modern industries, such as electronics, for people. The industry has had a poor image as an employer and it must change in order to attract good people into the industry.

Suppliers

Suppliers of materials and services—from timber to software—to the college are scattered throughout the world. This dispersion is related to the specialist nature of many of the materials and services sought, and to the infrequency and low quantities involved. However, some local suppliers have improved their business because of the presence of the college. In particular, the local hardware shop has expanded and moved into new, much larger premises.

Suppliers of supporting services, such as transport, groceries, and building trades, come mainly from the local area and have also seen an increase in business thanks to the college's activities.

Owners and Investors

Connemara West, and Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology are the owners of the Furniture College. CW owns the buildings; GMIT owns the programs and equipment. However, the issue of ownership by either partner is not really considered important. In fact, all the investment to date in the Furniture College has come from public funds, regardless of the conduit it passed through. Various government departments have contributed over the years for running costs and to capital funds. Continuing annual funding is expected to come largely from the Department of Education.

Industry funding of the Furniture College has been considered, and may be pursued in the future. There are, however, issues regarding independence if industry funding is achieved. In addition, obtaining funding from industry could be difficult. Giving funds to educational institutions without receiving direct benefits, e.g., specific research outcomes, is alien to Irish furniture companies.

Employees

Staff of the Furniture College are the most significant factor in the success of the college. From the beginning, the college has been successful in attracting skilled, energetic, and committed personnel. There are a number of reasons for this.

The dynamism and enthusiasm of existing staff infects potential employees the first time they visit Letterfrack.

The location is beautiful, intriguing, and laden with contradictions when one sees an organization teaching the latest in modern technology thriving in such a remote and rugged area.

The commitment, work rate, and enthusiasm of the students at the college make it a personally rewarding experience for staff.

The bias for growth and development in the college makes it a very exciting place to work, with opportunities for staff to become involved in a variety of projects.

In the last two years, a number of staff members have located in the area. This trend is expected to continue as the infrastructure and services in the area improve to meet the needs of the new arrivals.

While the Furniture Technology Center and the Furniture Restoration Center are commercial units independent from the Furniture College, they would probably not exist apart from the college. In addition, staff from both units work side by side with college staff and share resources and information freely with them.

Community

The effects on the local economy are, thus far, mainly attributable to the college itself rather than the students it produces. Nearly all students surveyed expect to leave the immediate area—not surprising since there are few local companies to employ them and because young people often seek areas with more social amenities. By expanding the employment base, the population of young people, and the visibility of the village, the college has given the community hope for economic growth. As the Furniture Technology Center grows, it also may create opportunities for new businesses in the Connemara region.

The local community has a direct input to the management and development of the Furniture College through Connemara West. Indeed, the

college would not exist were it not for the dedication and selfless energy of many community members. The vision that began years ago in the shape of a rural development organization has paid off in many benefits to the local community, including

- influx of students to the area (currently 90-100, for nine months of the year) and the associated economic benefits they bring
- returning immigrants and new families locating in the area—nine to date directly associated with the college (six with families) and others resulting from the increased economic activity in the area
- construction on the college in the last two years (some 3.5 million pounds worth) that provides work for local contractors and brings other workers into the area who then generate additional economic activity
- student involvement in the local community that enriches the local situation
- availability of college facilities for community use (e.g., library, evening classes, and sports facilities)
- availability of student housing and other facilities to serve a growing tourist trade in the off-season
- increased population which attracts investment for such things as infrastructure
- regularly scheduled bus service to Galway that did not exist before the college
- decline in the average age of the community (from 57 to 27) due to new incentives for young people to stay in the area
- decrease in the isolation felt by elderly people who now rent to students

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

Strengths

Staff

The college is fortunate to have retained an excellent staff at Letterfrack. And while concern exists that staff may leave or that it may become more difficult to find high caliber staff especially as the college expands, to date the 'Letterfrack effect' has resulted in the development and retention of a strong core team. In the rare case where a key team member leaves, the goodwill of the departing member and quick recovery of the team have ensured continuity.

Students

The college has also had a remarkable record in attracting good students. Applicants far outnumber openings, and the fact that students are drawn from all over Ireland and abroad is testimony to the reputation of the college and the community.

Industry acceptance

The Furniture College and its graduates have a strong relationship with industry and are beginning to change industry attributes and attitudes. Graduates are now in key positions that enable them to influence a number of companies. The full impact will only be known as more students move out into industry and into management.

Infrastructure and facilities

The college's buildings and equipment have been vastly improved in the last two years. The current buildings include a canteen, library, computer services building, four large workrooms, machine workshop, furniture restoration workshop, lecture rooms, laboratories, and staff offices. Plans for future facilities include extension of the new machine workshop, new laboratories, and sports facilities. From the beginning the college has invested heavily in high-quality equipment. This strategy has paid off in the longevity of usage and the functionality of the equipment. In recent years the investment in information technology has been increased, and the college currently boasts an excellent information technology resource. New volume production equipment has also been acquired. These expensive and sophisticated machines give the college state-of-the-art capacity in furniture production.

Bias towards growth and development

The college is continually looking forward; strategic planning meetings and discussions about the future take place regularly. Plans for the future include

- a distance education program
- a doubling of intake to the B.Sc. program by providing three different specializations
- new diplomas in automated furniture production and furniture restoration and coservation
- a masters degree program
- an increase in student numbers to 160 or more in three years
- a community-owned student housing village

Weaknesses

Location

While the location has played a part in the success of the college, its remoteness has limited the ability of the college to provide part-time courses for people working in the industry. The college recognizes this and plans are under way to address this market through distance education.

Student housing

A community-owned student housing project has been planned for some time, waiting only until a critical mass of students had been reached. This critical mass is expected to materialize by 2003, and wheels are now in motion to purchase land and apply for permission to develop housing.

Opportunities

Develop new programs

Demand exists for more specific and applied programs. The industry is, in particular, seeking readily employable people who do not require long learning curves and are already familiar with the language and technology of the industry.

Although significant opportunity exists to expand the range of courses, there is also value in expanding the markets for existing courses. The delivery of existing courses through distance education could increase student numbers without a proportionate increase in cost. Investigations into distance learning have revealed opportunities for widening the continuing education market and offering existing full-time courses to part-time students. There may also be opportunity to attract international exchange students to existing courses.

Finally, the importance of continually reviewing existing courses should not be overlooked. Doing so can yield improvements in the content and delivery of courses. For example, the quality and hence popularity of courses might be enhanced by introducing varied teaching techniques or more external visits.

Research program development

There is potential to develop applied research programs in cooperation with industry and involving masters degree students. Linkages with other campuses and institutions in Ireland and abroad could be developed on research programs. The development of a dedicated research center is outlined below.

Resource development

Any academic development plans must be supported by a resource development plan that provides the required resources and infrastructure and is also financially viable. For example, the development of up-to-date library facilities is particularly important in supporting academic development. The provision of adequate telecommunications infrastructure and information technology is also now absolutely essential in education.

Some less-obvious resources that will become more important in the future might include a support structure for teleworking and a "training for trainers" resource to develop the use of new educational techniques and methodologies, particularly participative models.

Partnership with industry

Industry wants partnership with educational institutions. And indeed, academic development would lack direction without industry feedback and guidance. Building even deeper partnerships—going beyond feedback and guidance—could yield interesting and innovative programs such as cooperative education modules. In addition, many companies have shown interest in short courses, applied commercial/industrial training workshops, and seminars that are organized and delivered at the college or at company premises. The provision of this type of service could be combined with applied research programs to develop a specific resource/research unit—perhaps an evolution of the Furniture Technology Center.

Operations practices and procedures

A system that allows lecturers to easily view the planned content of complementary subjects would facilitate the dovetailing of related topics in different subjects. Such a system could also facilitate the uniform loading of students with assignments and ensure that students did not become overloaded at different times of the year.

There may also be an opportunity to implement ISO 9000 quality management systems. The college already has many of the procedures in place that would satisfy ISO 9000 standards, so the implementation of procedures in non-compliant areas may not be such a difficult task. In addition to official confirmation and international recognition of the quality of service, the benefits of such an achievement could include improved customer service, increased interest in courses, and improved cost performance.

Threats

Sustainability

The college has developed rapidly in the last few years. Stress-related problems and burn out are already showing in staff. The balancing of responsibilities and workloads has to be addressed by college management.

The dangers of overload and stress must also be addressed for students. Some courses have already been restructured and refocused to address this problem.

Staff availability

The continued expansion of the suite of programs at the college is somewhat limited by the availability of new staff. Ireland suffers from serious shortages of qualified personnel across disciplines and industries. These shortages are felt more keenly in remote areas such as Letterfrack. The problem has been compounded by the introduction of a new lower entry-level lecturing grade in institutes of technology. The new grade is very unattractive for experienced professionals considering a lecturing career and is even unappealing to many new graduates who have excellent earning potential in industry.

In the short term, staff availability may delay the launching of new programs. The long-term solution to this problem is to make lecturing attractive as a career again and also to make relocation to Letterfrack attractive for potential employees. A possible partial solution to the problem is to reverse the flow of distance education. That is, use lecturers in other parts of the country, or elsewhere in the world, to deliver courses at Letterfrack using distance education techniques.

In addition, an unfortunate side effect of the economic boom in Ireland has been spiraling housing prices. Many rural areas, including the Letterfrack area, have been affected. The demand for rural retreats for the newly wealthy has pushed up house prices in the area. Some new staff who have relocated to Letterfrack are still renting, unable to purchase a home.

Distance education from other sources

The proliferation of web-based education providers could be a threat to the long-term plans of the college. The first college to provide web-based programs for the furniture industry will have a significant advantage over competitors. Already many colleges are offering programs on the web. And although furniture-specific web courses are hard to find today, plans are surely being advanced throughout the world at colleges that deliver furniture education. The distance education project at Letterfrack requires a large and immediate injection of funds in order to give it a chance of competing for an international market—and perhaps even the national market in the future.

Economic downturn

Economic downturns are inevitable. The potential effects on the Furniture College should be forecast and contingency plans prepared. Because the college is focused on an industry susceptible to economic downturn, the market for students is almost certain to contract in such an event. To guard against this, the college could set up a career counseling service that helps students find employment in other countries, facilitate firm start-ups, and direct more promotion efforts toward potential employers.

Community support and goodwill

The college currently enjoys the support and goodwill of the local community. However, with the continued growth in student numbers and the expansion of facilities at the college, the opportunities for problems increase. Growth in student numbers will place higher demands on the local infrastructure and will inevitably bring some undesirable behavior. Whereas large towns may be accustomed to this side effect and accept it as part of the package, a small rural community might react differently. The role of the college in managing the various relationships with community must be examined and clarified.

The expectations the community has about using college resources may also pose problems. It is likely that use of the current resources by staff and students will increase as the number of courses and students increase. However, the perception by the community may simply be of an increasing resource pool rather than an increasing pool with an increasing demand on that pool. Again, relationship management will need to be addressed by the college. Community access to resources must be dealt with sensitively, but realistically.

Conclusion

As a model for partnership between a rural community development organization and a third-level educational institution, the Furniture College provides many interesting insights and several practical lessons.

From a practical viewpoint, the standard cost measures for a third-level institution cannot be

applied in the start-up period. This is particularly true in the case of a small community-based, specialist campus. The fixed costs are relatively high and spread over a small number of students. Only recently have the standard measures starting coming into line; they should become comparable to other institutions when the student population reaches 150. Both partners have dealt with cost and funding issues over the years, and it is a credit to the tenacity of individuals in both organizations and the vision of government departments providing funding that the college has developed so well.

The partnership, while documented in various letters and exchanges over the years, has never been formally or legally established. That it has survived for over 12 years is largely due to the individuals on both sides and their passion for what the college is doing. By meeting and merging the objectives of community development and education for industry, the college has molded people with very different backgrounds, interests, and ambitions into a unique team. The conflicts and casualties inevitable in any partnership have occurred, have been surmounted, and have served to strengthen the team.

The Furniture College is a success. Its future looks guaranteed, and the portents are positive. Other rural community organizations looking at this project may well ask the question: Can we do this? The answer may well be "yes."

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